

BELL TOWER

Arts Journal
2012





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THE BELL TOWER ARTS JOURNAL

VOLUME 6
2011 – 2012

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Linda Gary, Ph. D.

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The editorial board for the journal is comprised of full-time faculty members from the English Department, the Graphic Arts Department, and the Fine Arts Department. The editorial board has the final approval on all selections and publication decisions.

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ABOUT THE TITLE:

Just as the Bell Tower at Tyler Junior College chimes on the quarter hour to mark the passage of time, it reminds students of the harmony which surrounds them in their educational pursuits. Music, dance, theatre, art, athletics, and academics blend to make Tyler Junior College a beacon to the community, the state, and the world at large. As the echoes of the chords filter through the oaks, their vibrations tremble far beyond the confines of the brick archways and winding walks where students gather. Tyler Junior College is a lofty tower of educational opportunity for students who have come from all parts of the world. *The Bell Tower Arts Journal* proudly hails the accomplishments of its hallowed halls and beckons those who would seek both its traditions and the promise of tomorrow.

~ Judith Bateman, 2006

EDITORIAL POLICY:

The Bell Tower Arts Journal is sponsored by the Psi Gamma Chapter of Sigma Kappa Delta, the National English Honor Society. We accept submissions of poetry, short fiction, non-fiction essays, photography, and fine and graphic art by current Tyler Junior College students. We accept submissions for consideration only during the fall semester each year for possible publication in the subsequent spring semester. *The Bell Tower Arts Journal* is entirely student generated and seeks to provide a publishing venue for the rich artistic expression of TJC students.

Our goal is to create a publication that is a high quality, content-rich source of literary and artistic expression on a wide range of topics and themes. Therefore, we seek unique, insightful work displaying vivid, lively language and artistic skill.

All submissions must be the original work of the student writer or artist who submits it for consideration or publication. We do not accept previously published or plagiarized work. Every attempt is made by the editor to assure originality. All literary pieces will be submitted to turnitin.com for an originality report. However, it is ultimately the responsibility of each student to submit only his or her own literary and artistic work.

Moreover, while we strongly support intellectual freedom as the right of every individual from all points of view, we do not accept work deemed pornographic, profane, exploitative, or that seeks to cause injury to an individual or group.

Tyler Junior College gives equal consideration to all applicants for admission, employment and participation in its programs and activities without regard to race, creed, color, national origin, gender, age, marital status, disability or veteran status.

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JERI

Lorianne Hubbard | Bullard | Charcoal

THE FOX

Hurt tearing at my back like a frightened fox,
Stealing my innocence:
Sly and cunning,
It slips in and out unnoticed,
Save for the scars it leaves on my back.

Why do your claws scratch me so?
I opened up and gave you my heart
Only to have it chewed up and spit out again.
Your fur coat is envious and beautiful,
But behind those eyes, you are deceitful.

Yet I will not hunt you down with dogs and guns.
No, I will let you live,
Only knowing what you did to me—
To my life,
To my heart,
To my soul.

Teri Klauser | Palestine



FESTIVAL FUN

Danielle Parker | Henderson | Digital Photograph

OBJECT

It has been stepped on, thrown away, disfigured, and perhaps accidentally ingested, but only I know the true meaning and beauty behind its purpose. The curves are no match for the intricate way it twists and turns around itself, leaving practically nothing up for the imagination. Small in stature, the meaning to its life is comparable but never outdone or matched. While its composition may be remnants of the past, its present existence, though perhaps severely ignored or underestimated, holds no greater importance to everyday life.

While it means very little to most, to some it is the world, holding itself to like-minded individuals in ways that other methods cannot. As it bonds them, it also can be removed as quickly as it was attached. From there, it is used for a new purpose or, in most instances, moves on to the next life in the garbage with the commoners. For me, it never fails and always works when I need it most, especially when all other methods have failed me time and time again. Its faithfulness is unwavering in shape and dependency, and perhaps no other object deserves my respect more than a paper clip.

Taylor Griffin | Tyler

A PLACE LIKE NO OTHER

When I look out the front windshield, glimpses of red tail lights and fog mesmerize me back to sleep. My head falls forward as I nod, but the movement brings me back. As I step out of the warm truck, the bite of the cold January wind on my face does a better job of bringing me back to the reality of hooded heads ducked and hands in pockets to protect against the cold. Exhibitors and agriculture teachers file across the parking lot. The only sound at this time of the morning is the crunch of boots on pavement, murmured instructions of what the day should bring, and the bawling of the hungry cattle. Walking towards the barn I see the many exhibitors leading their cattle back to the stalls in the dim street lights.

Walking into the barn, I begin to feel better. My favorite smell hits me—the Show Barn. The mixture of all the different hair products I use on my cattle, pine and cedar shavings, cow manure, cattle feed and hay blend with the rich aroma of Earth's dirt. When I bring my heifers in from the tie-outs, I feel the hard, pink, nylon rope against my rough hands. When I look at my calloused palms, I remember the countless hours of hard work put into getting my heifers to top show condition. I would not trade any of those countless hours for anything.

The hard concrete slab I stand on while washing my cattle makes my feet hurt for the rest of the day. I smell the fresh scent of ocean breeze, coconut shampoo, and the pungent aroma of manure clogging the drains. My toes are shriveled up like prunes, and my clothes are soaked from the cold water splashing off the cattle, giving me goose bumps. As the cold water hits the heifers' bodies, a mist, a steam, can be seen hovering over them. The loud noise of blowers being used everywhere makes it so loud that it is hard to think and gives me a headache. I make sure I do not talk to anyone while I am blowing out my cattle. The mist coming off the wet heifers mixed with Revive, a conditioner, is the most bitter, nasty taste I have ever gotten in my mouth.

Once back at the stall, I walk down the narrow, cluttered aisles to get to the feed and hay. The smell of feed is a very sweet scent. It is very rough to the touch and makes my hands sticky. When I put the feed down in front of my heifers, they lick the sweet molasses off my hands with their sandpaper-

like tongues. After they finish their feed and lie down, I curl up and lie between them. They put off heat and keep me warm. Their hair gets on me and makes me itch, and the soft shavings make a soft bed for me to catch up on some sleep.

By the end of the day I have a layer of grit plastered on my face and arms. It is a very unpleasant feeling, and I cannot wait to get home and shower. I go home sounding like I am getting sick because of all the dirt and hair that has blocked my sinuses. When I blow my nose, the tissue is brown from the dirt and hair from the dusty barn. It may seem crazy to some that I find this place so fun and appealing, and I admit that the conditions are sometimes harsh, but I find this place to be soothing, a place I cannot wait to go back to. Sometimes I think I am somewhat crazy for enduring the cold weather and the toll the lack of sleep does to my body, but I love my heifers, the people I show with, and the clean wholesome fun that this place offers.

Alli Watkins | West



SKY IN FLAMES

Sarah Chapin | Tucson, AZ | Digital Photograph

NORMALITY?

Have you ever heard the sounds of colors
Or tasted the smell of the number nine?
Have you ever stopped to listen to the music
Of the vibrant letters as they pass by?
Have you ever tasted the sweetness of sound
Or felt their smells float up and down?
Now you may think this rather absurd
Or quite out of the blue,
But for some of us in this world,
This is all very true.
Some think us strange;
Some call us liars,
But all this hate
Just makes me tired
Because maybe it's you instead of me,
And maybe the normal ones
Are the synesthetes.

Juliana Volberding | Tyler



BELIEFS GIVE SPEECH

Daniel Haddad | Mexico City | Acrylic

MY HEART'S AWAKENING

Beauty surfs wildly through the waves of your hair;
Your skin is radiant like snow;
Yet red roses bloom in the garden of your cheeks.
Beauty has kissed you, my love;
The sprinkling evidence lies on the bridge of your nose.

Fortunate is *la nina* that swims in the ocean of your eyes:
The color is magnificent!

Your arms are like rods of gold,
And your embrace accompanies safety.
Your natural fragrance makes me faint with passion:
I am so drawn to you, dear!

You are gorgeous, my love!
Whoever thought there was no perfection?

Your kisses drench the sweet nectar from your lips:
What an exotic fruit you have for a mouth.
Your lips whisper a soft melody,
And the notes dance into my ears.
Sweetness drips like honey from your words:
They have awaked me for the very first time.

Oh, lover! You have spoken to me and said:

“Arise, my darling,
My beautiful one,
And come with me!”

I kept my eyes shut,
But my heart was already awake:
Only you have awakened love in me!

Loammi Pedroza | Tyler



CRYSTALLINE

Lenzie N. Rodgers | Tyler | Digital Photograph



LOOKING UP AT LIBERTY

Michael Morse | Tyler

1957 Brownie Hawkeye Film Photograph

I NEED

All the things I need to show me love:
A hat and maybe some gloves,
A gentle kiss when it's rough,
A walk through the park: deep, passionate, loving the dark,
Gifts with much thought, time that can't be bought.
I need to know that you care by the moments we share,
Moments of encouragement when in need.
I need your trust indeed.
I need your children so we can both
See the love that no other treasures can hold.

Ywona Rich | Riverside, California



DUCK

Christina Diana-Victoria Carter | Romania
Digital Photograph



THIS IS THE TAKEOVER

Amanda Hatfield | Lindale | Acrylic



THE BLACK BEAR

Erika Garrett | Sulphur Springs | Acrylic

LANGUISHING OVER LIVER

It was mid to late fall. I was an energetic pre-teen of about twelve years old. To my delight, it was also a Saturday. This meant a much-needed reprieve after slaving over my lessons at school. Finally, there were no teachers, no tests, and most importantly, no cafeteria food.

Stretched out on the couch watching television, I could hear my mother in the kitchen starting to cook. I could hear the sharp popping sound of hot grease in the frying pan. My mind wondered what culinary delight she was whipping up for us tonight. Perhaps hamburgers and homemade French fries, affectionately known as “Momma Fries,” would grace our palates. Maybe her world famous, at least in my mind, fried chicken was on the menu.

Suddenly, my nose was accosted by a strange, pungent, and nauseating odor. I had never smelled this before—nor did I want to again. Leaving my comfy perch, I decided to investigate this unpleasant and new smell. Bravely, I trudged towards the kitchen, trying not to sound rude or disrespectful; I tried to ask Mom what was cooking. She explained that we were having something she had eaten often when she was my age. She proudly announced we were having liver and onions.

As I made my way back to the living room, I cringed at the thought of eating a cow’s liver. I was not a vegetarian, but the thought of this turned my stomach. Thoughts of whether I would be able to go through with this raced through my mind. I sat there in silence, much like a convicted criminal in his final moments, waiting for that switch to be pulled that would end his life.

Breaking the silence suddenly, my mother’s voice called me to the dinner table. There was no turning back now. Reluctantly, I listlessly made my way to the dining room table. My knees weakened, and my stomach turned for the second time.

I stared down at my plate to see this so-called delicacy staring back, taunting me as if daring me to take a bite. Sitting down, I poked at it with my fork, analyzing this thing called liver. The hunk of heinous meat lay on my plate smothered in brown gravy and what seemed like hundreds of diced onions. It appeared as if it was a bunch of mud-covered maggots clinging to a meal of road kill, and it smelled no better.

My mother sensed my bewilderment and told me, as she always did, “Try it; if you don’t like it, you don’t have to eat it all.” I had always adhered to this rule because I enjoy a great many foods today that I would have never tasted. Somehow, I knew that this time it would not be the case.

I was not about to disrespect the hard work my mother had put into preparing this meal. I gathered all my strength to brave at least one bite. Picking up my fork and knife, I cut into the putrid slab. I was trying my best to coach my mouth to swallow quickly and my stomach to keep it down.

Raising the cut portion to my lips, I took one final breath. Into my mouth it went. The texture was strange. It was mushy and slimy yet firm. To me it tasted spoiled. I knew right away I would have no more of this offensive liver--thanks to my mom’s own rule.

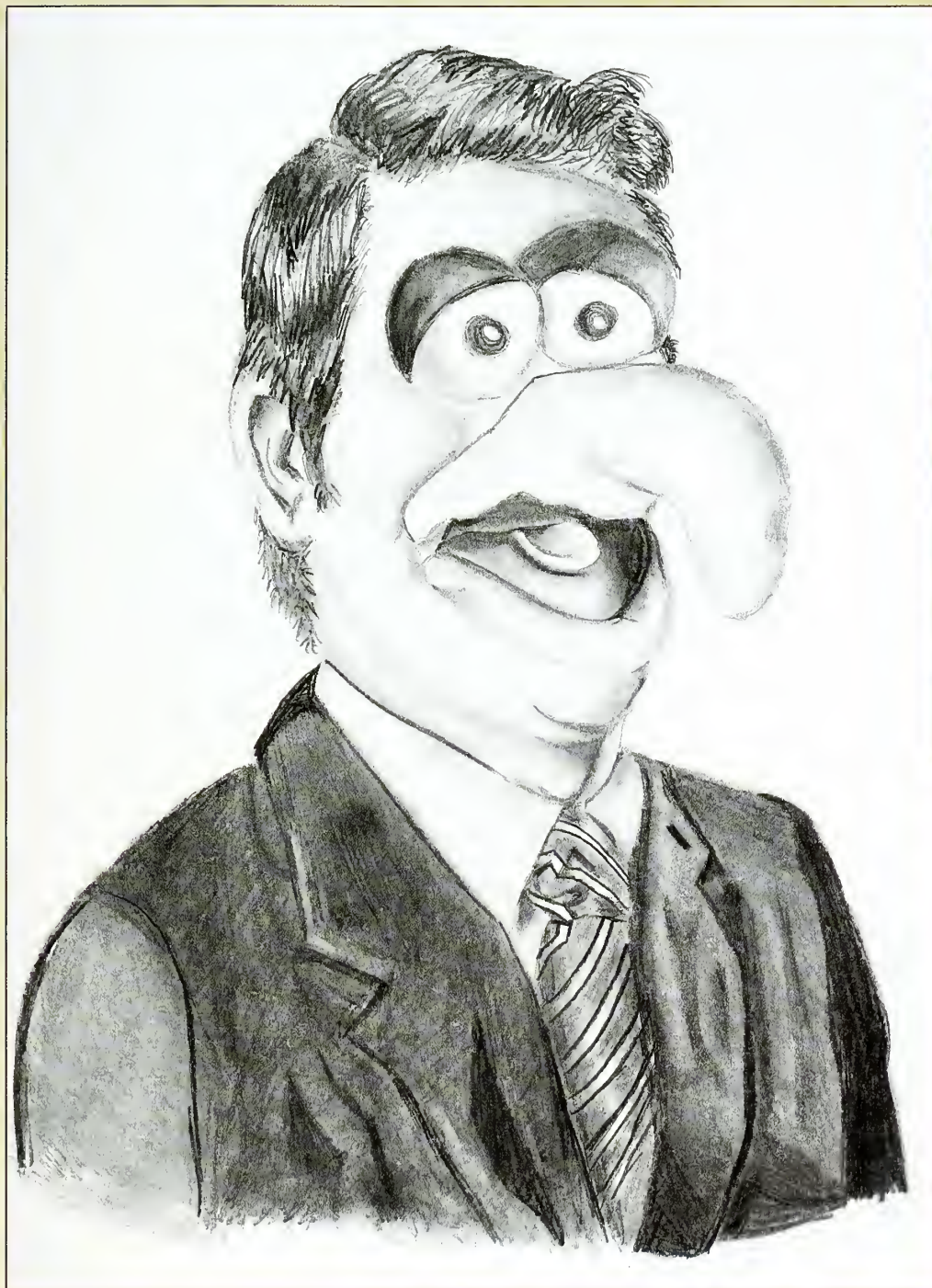
My mother looked at my contorted face and tried not to laugh as she told me that I did not have to eat any more. Politely, I excused myself and scurried to my room. Lying on my bed, I thought to myself, *what a day!* I really never thought I would miss cafeteria food.

Theresa Boyd | Neches



SOMATA

Erika Garrett | Sulphur Springs | Acrylic



BRINE'S GOOD TODAY!

Matt Ragan | Bullard | Graphite

FROZEN

Waves crash at my feet,
Water sprays on my face;
It wakes me.

Yet everyone else is asleep;
Their eyes are closed,
Oblivious to the scene around us.

The sun shines, lighting up the beauty of the day.
Yet still, no one stirs;
They stand there still.
Darkness the only thing they see behind their closed lids.

I dance and run in the waves;
I beg them to join.
I spin.

They are frozen despite the heat.
Their feet are planted in the sand,
Ignoring.

I keep walking,
But they are far behind.

I keep singing,
But they are silent.

I keep speaking,
But their ears are closed.

I keep smiling,
But their eyes are blind.

Soon they are far away:
Only a speck in my eye—
A distant memory,
A mere thought ,
An idea.

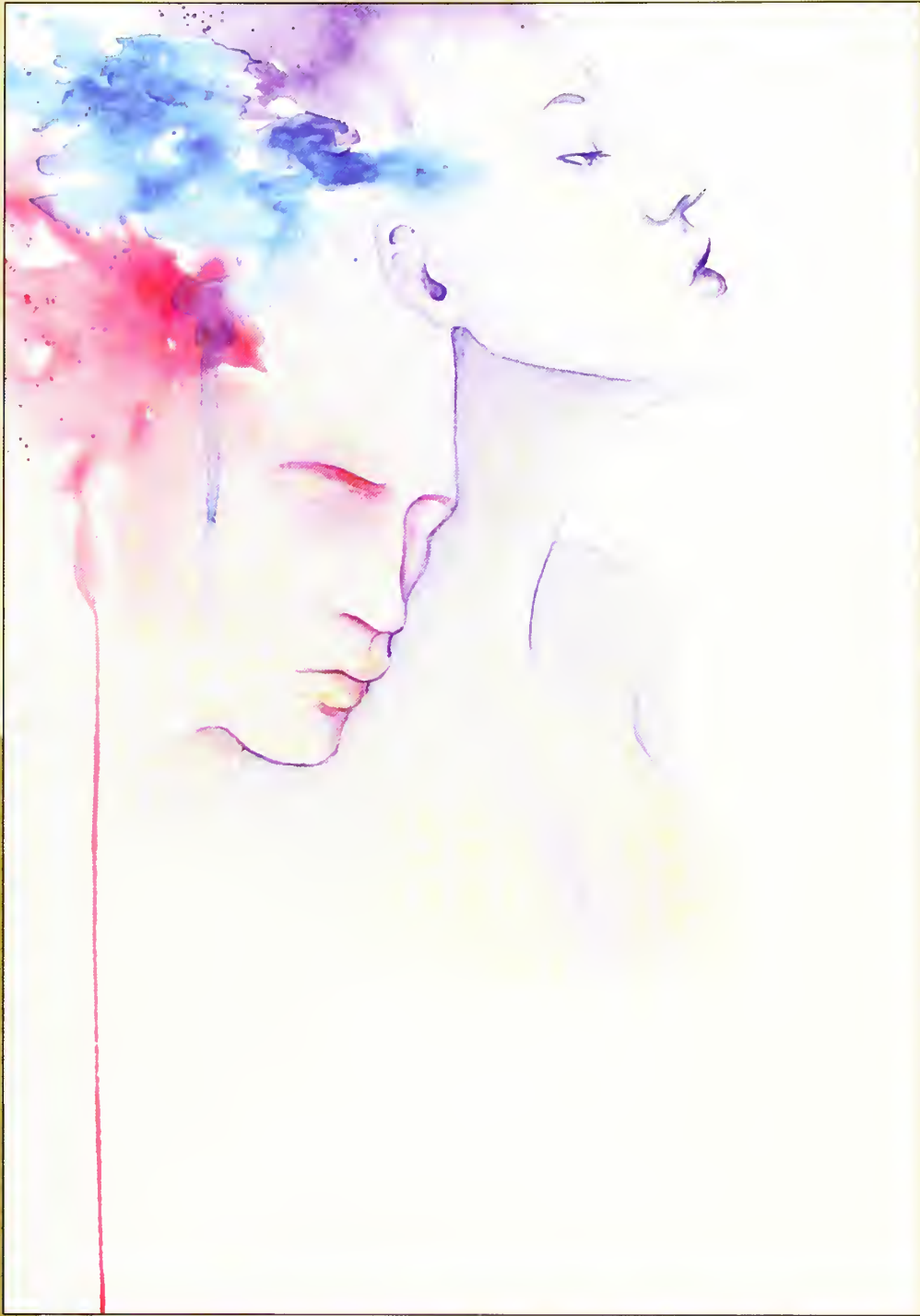
A dream.

Teri Klauser | Palestine



RAY OF INNOCENCE

Grace Stubblefield | Lindale | Canon EOS Rebel T2i



UNTITLED

Amanda Hatfield | Lindale | Watercolor

GRANDPA'S POSITIVE ATTITUDE

Having a positive attitude is a good quality. Optimists seem to be happier in life than pessimists. I've known few people to be positive all the time, but my grandfather was the most positive person I ever knew. He was like the rainbow after the storm; he always found the good in bad situations. My grandfather was a tall and muscular man. He had scars on his face and arms, as well as one going vertically across his left eye. He loved to tell the story about that one. "I got it in 'Nam when an eight-year-old threw a grenade by me. When it exploded, a piece of shrapnel cut across my eye." He always told this story with a smile on his face as he would laugh about the good times and the bad times. He always talked about after the war when I used to spend the summer at his house in Chico, California. I can remember the big, white, plantation-style home with royal blue shutters and a big, fire engine red door with a gold knocker. We used to play hide-and-seek in the house, and he would push me on the tire swing, or we would just lie on the almost pillow-like, blue-green grass. Throughout my teenage years, my grandfather stayed happy, healthy, and positive, but then we got some tragic news.

On my seventeenth birthday, my grandfather was feeling pain in his chest when he breathed. "It's nothing," he said, but we insisted on taking him to the doctor. He agreed. At the doctor's office, he was cracking jokes left and right. The nurse came out and called him into the room where you wait for an hour for only a ten-minute check-up.

As I sat reading crappy magazines, I wondered what could be wrong. Was it something that could be controlled with medicine? Was it something that would be slow and painless, or would it be a savage disease sabotaging his body like a pack of rapacious dogs rending at his sinews? When he came out of the office, I felt like hugging him and telling him I loved him, but before I could he said, "Man, that doctor's hands are cold!" I couldn't help myself: I exploded with laughter. I was so taken back at the extreme change of emotion that I had forgotten my fear of a deadly disease. I was happy for the rest of the day, but that night my grandfather revealed to us what he learned from the doctor.

While we were eating, he stood up and said he had an announcement. He said this with such a calm and nonchalant tone that no one expected what he said next. "The doctor told me today that I have cancer in my lungs and that I only have six months to live." I once again felt myself tearing up, but he quickly assured us that everything would be okay.

I said, "But you only have six months left."

"No", he said, "the doctor said I only have six months left. I bet you one-hundred dollars that I'll live longer."

I accepted that because I knew if I didn't, he would call me a "chicken" while doing the best impression of one I have ever seen. The first few months went by fast, and he did not "live like he was dying." He just went about his life as he normally ever did. When the sixth month came, he began having trouble breathing and needed an oxygen tank. All he said to this was "Now I don't have to go outside to get fresh air."

I didn't see how he could be so positive at a time like this. I felt like I was dying just because of how much I was worrying. On the twenty-fifth day of the sixth month, he began coughing up blood. We insisted on taking him to the doctor, but he said just to lay him on his bed. He was in bed all day and all night, but he was still positive and happy as could be. It was the thirtieth day of that sixth month, and Grandpa asked me to stay with him that night, so I would be there when he won his bet.

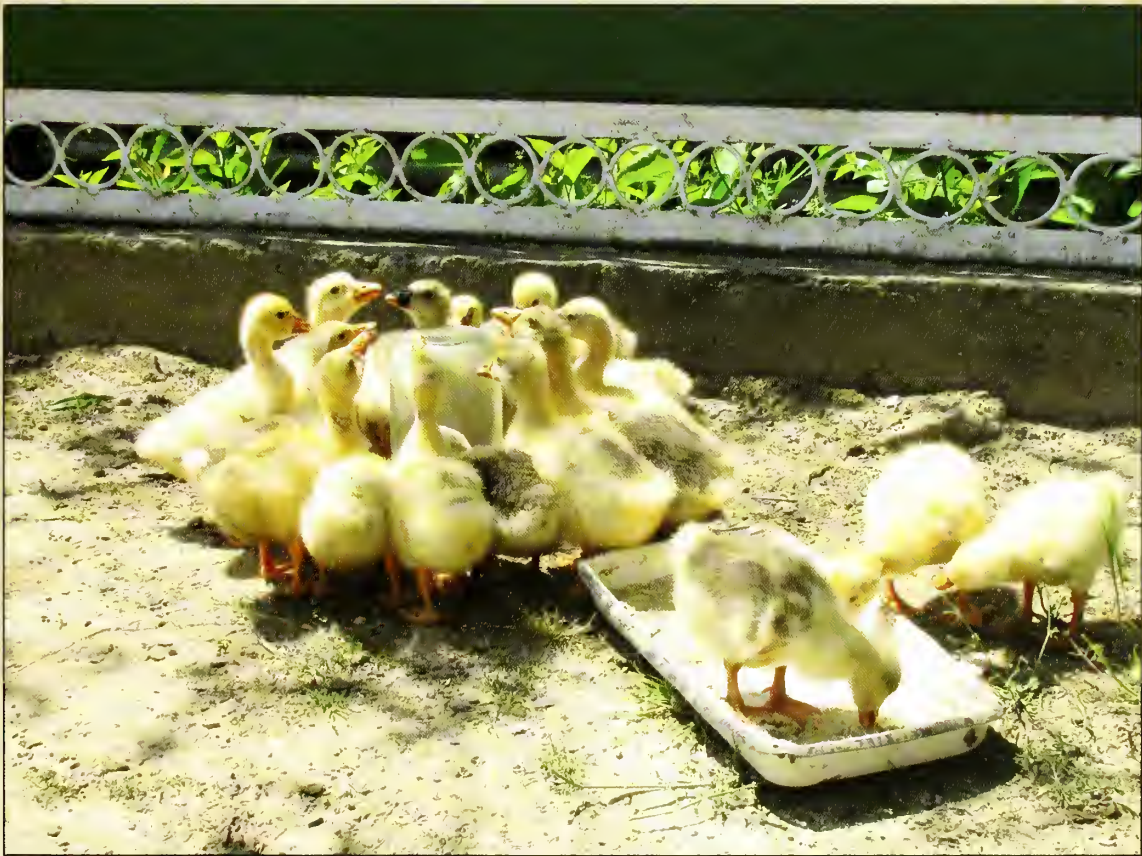
That night he told me his life's story, and that his greatest memories were spent with me-- "except the ones spent with Grandma." I fell asleep towards the end of his stories, and when I awoke the next morning, he was gone. Later that day after funeral arrangements had been made, I noticed I had a text on my phone received at four o'clock that morning that read You owe me \$100. I couldn't help but laugh.

At his funeral, there were many people who spoke about my grandfather, and all of them seemed to mention how positive he was. With him was buried a Bible, his watch, his military uniform, an American flag, and a one-hundred dollar bill. After the ceremony, I began talking to some of the people who were at the funeral. The most interesting one was the medic who cared for my grandfather when he was injured by the grenade in Viet Nam. He told me that my grandfather had lost his vision in that eye, but that my grandfather said, "It's just a scratch. I should be able to see out of it in no time." The medic told me that he went back into battle the next day, and within two weeks, his vision was completely restored because of his positive attitude.

My grandfather was a great man with a very positive attitude. This made a huge impact on a lot of people throughout his life. The most important

lesson I learned from my grandfather was to stay positive and always have an optimistic outlook on all situations in life. "In bad or dangerous situations people panic, but it only takes one person being calm and positive to control the situation better." My grandfather told me this when he told me the story of his life. He said that if I remember nothing else he told me, I should remember that.

Jacob Smith | Tyler



FARM LIFE

Haylee Bazil | Tyler | Digital Photograph

WISHES FROM A LITTLE GIRL

"I'm sorry," the little girl cried into the wind
As Hate stared at her with a leering grin.
"I'm sorry that I messed up."
Hate yelled, "Oh, shut up!"
"I tried so hard. I did all I could,
But you never accepted me; you never would,
But that's why you're Hate!
You make hell my fate
Because that's all I know
Since you wouldn't let go!"
Tears streamed down the little girl's cheeks,
But her head was raised high as she turned again to speak.
"You needed a scapegoat,
So know you can gloat
Over destroying a little girl
With rage and fury unfurled.
I hate what you've done
Because now I must run
From the memories of a hell
So awful I dare not tell.
I hate how you hurt me;
Yet, in pleasure, you see
How you destroyed me in a game
From which, I will never be the same.
You played with my mind like a worthless toy,
But my spirit you could not destroy.
That's why I can stand here today
With all the guts in the world, to say

Yes, I hate this hell that I must live through,
But one day I'll be free, and that makes me better off than you."
The little girl turned and looked away.
"Well, that's enough daydreaming for one day."

Juliana Volberding | Tyler



CROW

Michael Nuss | Pickton | Digital Photograph



HOW POLAR BEARS STAY WHITE

Jonathon David Brown | Tyler | Acrylic



ARABESQUE

Lenzie N. Rodgers | Tyler | Digital Photograph

YOUR MIRROR

A reflection of what has been,
Of what was,
Of what will never be again.

For this mirror is now cracked.
A thick thread runs up and down,
Marring the once perfect image,
Declaring its death.

How did this happen?
The shimmering image now gone,
Cast off in denial,
Exiled into the unknown
To suffer and be scorned,
Betrayed and abused,
Never to be seen again in the light of the sun or moon.

For I shall hide my pain:
I shall lock it away and hide the key,
Bearing the burden alone, for you shall forget,
Forget the secret behind my lips,
Forget the curse that controls my heart.

Teri Klauser | Palestine



BOGART

Mason Buchanan | Bullard | Ink



DOMESTIC EYE

Lesley Lerma | Tyler | Digital Photograph



DON'T CONTROL MY MUSIC

Amanda Hatfield | Lindale | Acrylic

I LOVE YOU IS NO MORE.

There in a dark corner a lone lover cries,
But there is no one there to wipe the tears from her eyes.

Love has abandoned her just as it has a million times before;
Now with her arms around her knees she rocks on the floor.

Love has failed her before it even had a chance to start;
Yet she keeps playing Russian roulette with her heart.

She screams in agony for all the world to hear
As the lies of past lovers endlessly ring in her ears.

In front of her lies a bright and shiny knife:
A choice to be made whether to take or save a sad little life.

She fights against herself until inside she is black and blue,
But it's far too late now; her heart and mind know what they want to do.

In protest she tightly closes her eyes and throws back her head
As death creeps in the room and patiently prepares her bed.

She reaches down and grabs the knife
While her soul begs and pleads for her life.

Then quick with just one slice there goes the blade:
She whispers as she falls, "I just corrected every mistake I've made."

The crimson blood flows quickly from her open veins;
She gasps for air as her heart begins to strain.

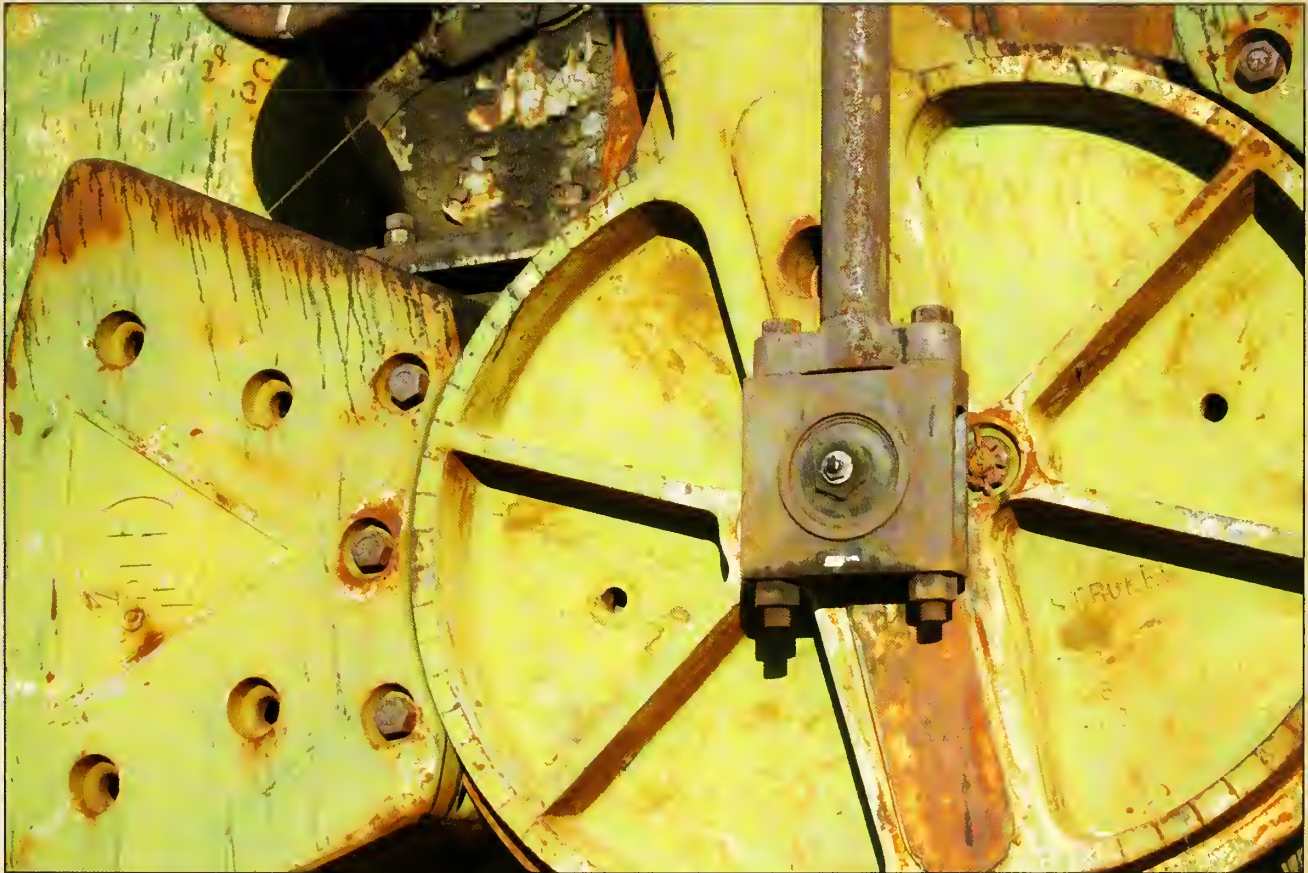
The light that once made her unique now fades from her eyes;
Her loving soul can't hold on even though it tries.

This is it; the time has come for the lone lover's life to end:
She reaches out now to embrace death, her one true friend.

Death holds her like a child as it lays her down to bed;
Yet another victim of love lies motionless and dead.

As death leaves it pauses to trace a message on the bloody floor:
A message that simply reads: I Love You Is No More.

Theresa Boyd | Neches



OLD DERRICK

*Morgan Billman | Hawkins
Digital Photograph & Photoshop*



THE WARRIOR

Samantha Trimble | Tyler
Pen, Ink, and Colored Pencil

STOOD UP

Anticipation and nervous guilt had never before accumulated so much in such a tiny cubicle as it did that day in Drew's confined workspace. He knew he had screwed up—big time. His phone rested beside his computer, and he stared at it as though it were about to explode into flames. Just then, his death sentence sprang up on the caller ID. Trembling, he answered, awaiting his punishment.

"Where were you last night?"

"Oh, Sarah, I..." He tried to cover up for his unforgivable blunder.

"I waited for you for three hours! Three hours, Drew!" she shouted as he wondered where she could have been able to yell so loudly.

"Honey, please. I can explain."

"Oh, this'll be good."

Taking a gulp that felt like an apple in his windpipe, he began his sob story. "First off, I did *not* forget, Sweetie."

"Gushy names will not work this time," she retorted. "Keep going."

"Well, you see...." He tried to come up with something clever that sounded at least half plausible, but he knew the human lie detector on the other side of the conversation would not fly with that obvious nonsense.

"We had this night set up for weeks, Drew. You were the one who wanted to do it! Do you know how many strings I had to pull to get that expensive Italian restaurant to accept us on such short notice?"

The odds were certainly not in his favor now. Every single point she made was valid. Beads of sweat dripped down his brow as he loosened the strangling tie knotted around his neck. Strangely, it seemed to tighten the more she spoke, practically hanging him by the throat with her words.

"Sarah, please forgive me. I'm begging. Please see me tonight. There's something we need to talk about."

“Andrew Jonah Wilkes, you *tell* me what you were doing last night!” She used his full name—never a good sign. He had nothing to say to her that wouldn’t completely give away his whereabouts the previous night. Shame and guilt consumed him.

“I can’t. I just can’t.” With these words, he knew the gates of Hell would be upon him. However, nothing was said on the other end. After a few moments, the silence was broken by Sarah’s soft crying.

“Were you with her?”

“Honey, no! I would *never* do that to you.”

“Then I just don’t understand. I thought you loved me.” The pitiful honesty and cry for help in her voice made him want to jump off a bridge for what he had done to such a sweet creature.

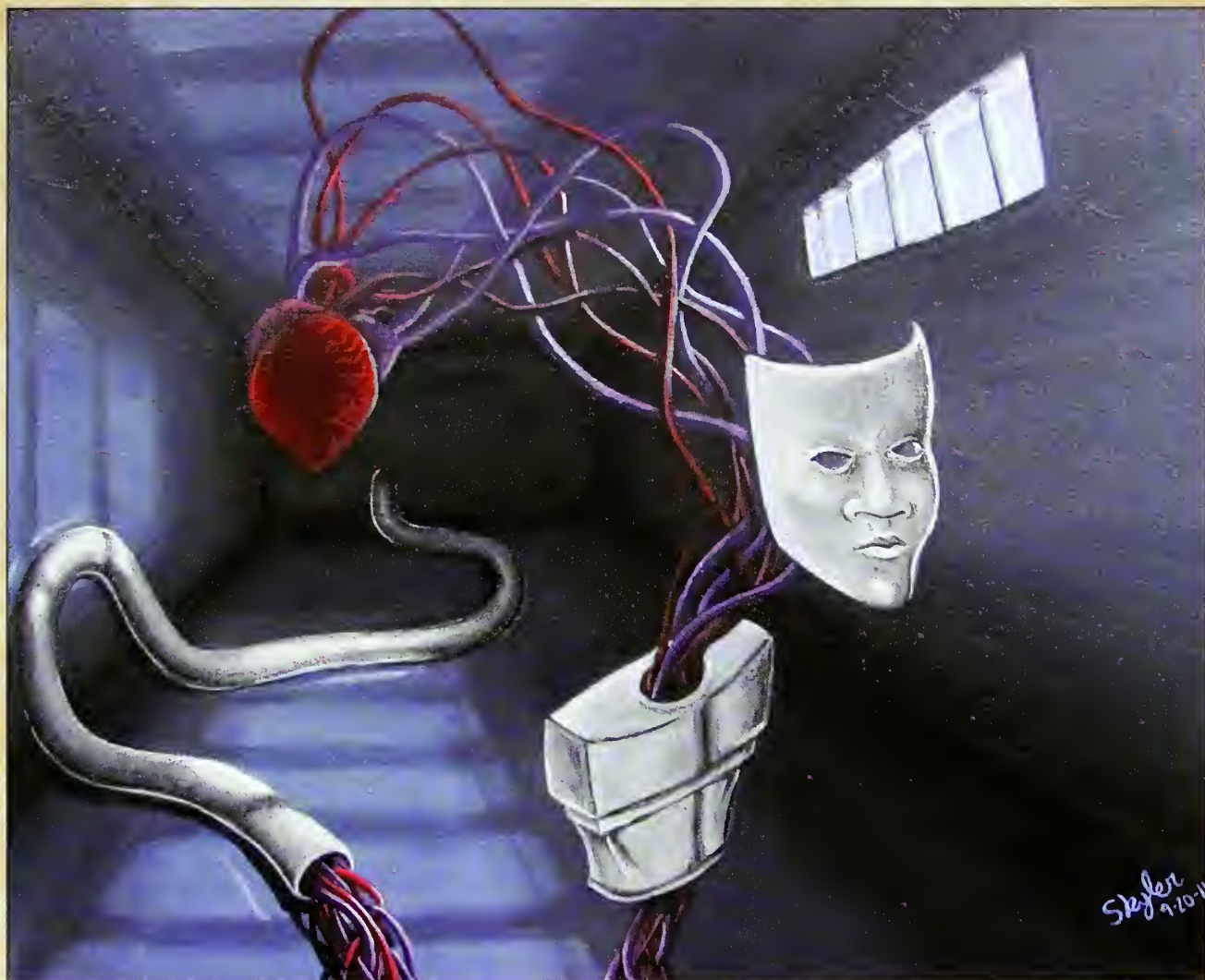
“I do love you—so very, very much. More than I can even express. That’s why I need a second chance. Please.”

That was it. He didn’t have the courage to tell her that he cut himself shaving more than once due to a shaky hand or that he changed his outfit fourteen times before leaving his apartment. He didn’t want to tell her that he didn’t have the money for a bouquet of roses and managed only to buy a handful of daisies. He didn’t have the strength to tell her he stood outside the restaurant for the remaining time she was there, completely entranced by the sight of her.

Sarah had donned her red dress that fit her like a glove, worn her mother’s diamond earrings, and flawlessly curled her hair—she knew he liked it that way. In the time he stood there, a tear softly streamed down his face as all the memories of them together flashed back to him, and he fell in love with her again just as easily as it had been the first time. Sarah was perfect—there simply were no other words to describe what he saw, and they were perfect for each other. How could a guy like him be so incredibly lucky?

Of all the events leading up to his finally leaving the restaurant without so much as going inside, he came to the conclusion that he simply didn’t have the guts to tell her about the engagement ring silently burning a hole through his pocket.

Taylor Griffin | Tyler



MIND OF THE IMPRISONED HEART

Skyler Longoria | Mineola | Acrylic



SHAPELY BLUES

Ashli Owens | Bullard

Digital Photograph & Photoshop



LADY OF THE BAR

Eliseo Viramontes, Jr. | Tyler | Acrylic

I ONCE KISSED THE DEVIL

I once kissed the devil, and it turned my soul black:
From That Moment I knew there was no turning back.

He planted a seed that grew and grew
Until one day I turned my back on all that I knew.

Then my blood turned to venom and my heart to ice;
I didn't know the meaning of the words caring, thoughtful, or nice.

I craved pain, hatred, and even my own insanity;
I was so lost that even God was just a joke to me.

Then one day I was out with my friends
When that whole crazy world came crashing to an end.

We were going so fast with nowhere to go;
We were all victims of a lack of control.

The devil, once my friend, had left me for dead:
Confused, alone, and banished to exist only in my head.

It was dark, cold, and there wasn't enough room to sit or stand
Till I felt warmth and there stood God with an opened hand.

But I had turned my back and denied God; what would He want with me?

He said, "Today a girl died: she was hollow, bitter, and consumed
by her own misery."

He said, "It is in her memory that you go forth this day;
Find those like her, show them how to love and teach them a better way."

Lord, from this day forth I will be completely obedient to you,
And if this is what you ask of me, then this is what I must do.

But I feel like her voice isn't completely dead:
I hear her whispers of temptations inside of my head.

Temptations which would cause nothing but trouble and strife,
And I must tell her that ended with the loss of her life.

And should the devil come back for another kiss,
I will not scream nor run nor throw a fit; no, only smile and simply say this:

I once kissed the devil and it turned my soul black;
Now I am on God's side and He has my back.

Theresa Boyd | Neches



WONDER & WHIMSY

Ashlie Baley | Lindale | Digital Photograph



AUDREY

Lorie Parsons | Pacific Northwest | Acrylic

THE BEAST

So many times did I think such horrible thoughts about him. So many times did I feel the guilty whiplash of those thoughts, but yet I could not help them. I think it helped me to accuse him of the same thoughts about me. Perhaps thinking that he hated me as much as I hated him helped me with the guilt I felt. I know not the answer to this scenario because I have dealt with my anger and bad thoughts toward him for so many years that I cannot think of him as human anymore. It was, and is, far easier to think of him as a Beast from within my imagination rather to think of him as human. To even think that he was part of my flesh and blood would indicate that there is a part of him living inside of me, but I do not want to think that.

I think back, way back, in my past history with the Beast. I remember him well: large forearms, hair as thick as a sharp holly bush, and brows standing forward which shaded his tiny, evil eyes very well. What I remember most about him was that he would grunt from time to time. If there was nothing negative to say, he would only grunt like the primate he was.

As a child, I remember that the Beast was always hiding away. I think it was that he did not like the fact that there was another one like him in the house or anyone in the house on that note. True, I wanted to meet the Beast that made me, but he never would show. The only time I saw any indication that he was near were the open soda cans filled with his tobacco spit. If the cans were grouped together, then the Beast was cleaning, but if only one sat near the television or his large brown chair, then he was very near and was resting. I never played with the Beast because of my fear of him. Whenever I saw his face, he always seemed to be angry with me. In later years of my childhood, I often wondered what I had done to anger the large Beast. Did I spill his soda cans? Did I make a joke about his large arms? What had I done to anger the Beast?

I grew older and time came for me to become a young man in training. However, who would train me? I tried to learn from the television, but the make-believe stories were hard to learn from. I tried to learn from books, but I found myself more in the reading than in the learning. I asked my lovely mother one day about how I should train to become a man. My mother, kind as she was wise, suggested that I learn from the Beast.

The Beast? What, or why, should I learn from the Beast? My mother had no answer; all she could tell me was that the Beast was the only one who knew how to train me. I shrugged because deep down I knew, as well, that the Beast was the only one who could train me. So I went in search of the Beast and found him in his homemade blacksmith's shop.

In his large hand was his soda can and in his lower lip was a lump of chewing tobacco. He was forging something together: a piece of metal was shoved into a pile of hot, golden coals. The Beast watched the metal with his little eyes. His other large hand was shoved into the little pockets on his little jeans.

I did not want to frighten the Beast away since this was my only chance to catch his attention; yet again, I did not want to seem frightened by him. Indeed, I wanted to show the Beast that I was ready to become a man. I puffed out my chest and held my chin high. I declared, "I am ready to be a man oh, great Beast."

The Beast slowly turned his head to me and gave me a blank stare. He then slowly lifted his soda can to his mouth to spit out a large drop of tobacco-enriched saliva into the poor little aluminum can. His little blue marble-like eyes barely moved from my frame. He then opened his mouth and laughed with a chicken-like cluck.

My chest slowly fell down. My chin hit my fallen chest with a thud.

The Beast continued to laugh.

Throughout my life, that is exactly what the Beast did. When I tried to make myself better, he laughed. When I stood up for what I believed in, he laughed. Even when I sided with him in his own battles, he joined with the enemy, and they both laughed. On and on did the laughter continue throughout my life. He joined my enemies for a good laugh about me, and he joined with his own enemies and had a good laugh with them.

With the Beast on my back and his influence on my enemies, I began to wonder if I could ever become a great man or person. Was I really what they joked and laughed about? Was my life just that, a joke?

Questions turned to confusion and confusion soon turned to anger, and that anger was what brought the horrible thoughts to life. True, at first I blamed those who laughed, but my mind was blinded by anger and sadness, and I did not realize to whom the real blame should go.

Many years passed and soon I pushed my enemies away. I could not fight them because I thought of myself as weak and powerless. I could do only one thing—hide. I found a great hiding spot within my imagination. I was free from self-doubt and self-loathing and free from sadness. However, when one hides in one's own mind, one tends to hide away from those around one. I pushed, scared, and warned people away from me and my hiding spot. I did not want them to see me. I did not want them to find me. I did not want them to laugh. I hid so well in the dark spots of my mind that I was able to stay in my little spots for days and away from people. I was able to crawl, to creep and to live in darkness.

Then one shining day, I decided to take advantage of being in my mind, and I took a stroll. I found my Id and spoke with him. I had a challenging conversation with my Ego. Finally, I had a great wrestling match with my Super Ego. Through my encounters with myself, I soon realized that I was funny. It was very true that I had a great sense of humor, but I was also passionate and romantic. I was also talented and wise with a great sense of my own charm. I looked at myself once more with these things in mind and wondered what I was hiding away from. Was I worried that I would be laughed at because I could smile when bad things happened? Was I worried that I was going to be laughed at because I could tell stories of great adventure? Was I worried that I was going to be laughed at because I could make others feel good about themselves? What was I worried about?

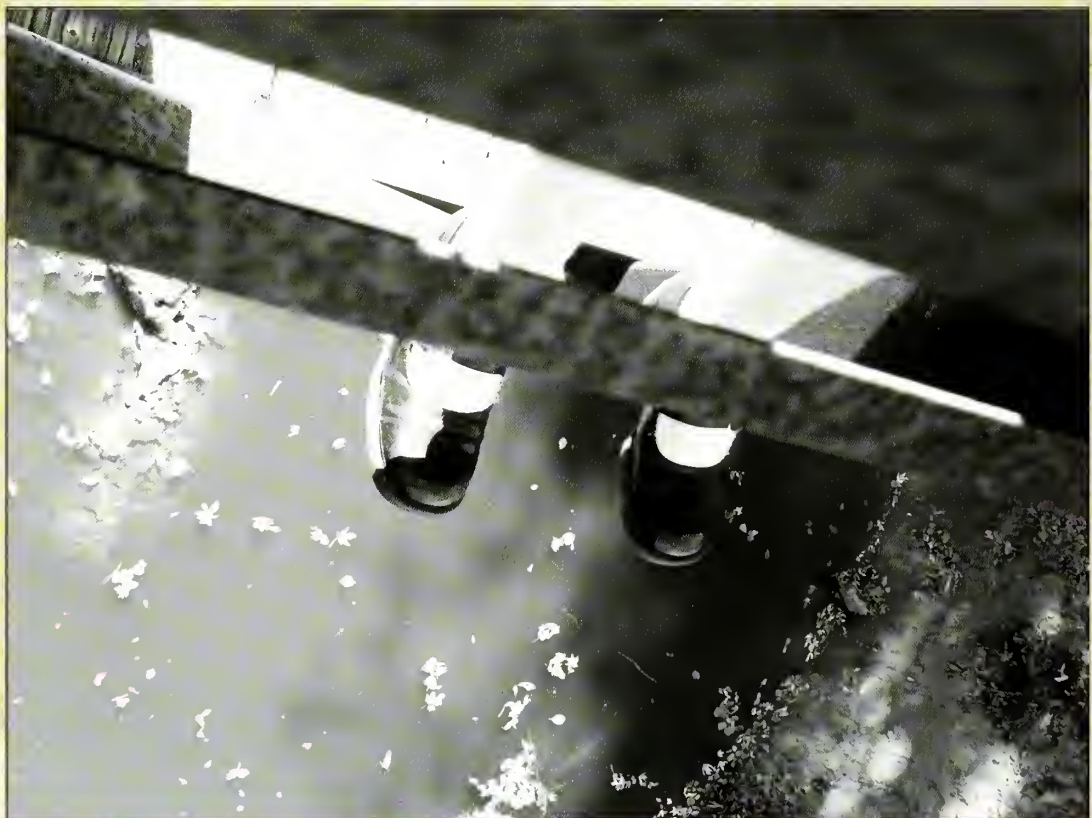
My chest swelled with pride and my chin was high as I emerged from my hiding place. I met people, and they soon laughed—but not at me. They laughed at my jokes, stood in awe of my stories, and leaned their crying tears on my shoulder when they were sad. I became stronger and found many friends. However I did not realize how strong I was until I saw him again. Yes, it was the Beast who had returned from my dark past.

The Beast grunted when he saw me and asked how my life was going. I told him what I knew, no longer afraid of what he would do. Naturally, the Beast cackled at me and made a joke. I only smirked and nodded to bid him good day.

The Beast grew confused and asked me another question. I did not answer his question because I had an engagement to be part of and had no time to hear another joke of his. The Beast grew angry with confusion. He yelled out another question as I walked away, but again, I did not answer him.

It has been years since I heard the laughter of the Beast. It has been years since I last saw him. I grew into a strong man without his aid. I became my own man. Yet, I still have trouble looking in a mirror from time to time because when I look at my reflection, I see the image of the Beast. True, his genetics are only skin deep; however, his face is there along with his long hair. I see the large brow and large arms. Many times I do have to remind myself that I may be his son, but I am not the Beast.

Raymond Homan | Athens



AFTERNOON MUSINGS

Samantha Trimble | Tyler | Photograph



NO NEED TO RUN

Christopher Umierski | Brownsville | Acrylic

ATONEMENT

A beautiful rumor
Built by stones mortared with lies
From empty bellies withering on mountains
To spies in sycamore trees,
And men who stone and spit upon broken whores;
They all gathered to head your wistful wisdom.

Your anger so righteous,
Once you spoiled the rod.
The wind of waving palms kissed your bearded face;
Then you carried your burden
Through the ravenous malice of your own mob:
Your end gave new birth to time.

But keep your forgiveness:
Leave my soul and sins alone.
And let me add water to your wisdom's wine;
They belong only to me--
It is my choice to account for all that's mine.

Blake Acker | Albuquerque, NM



STREET KINGS

Jonathon David Brown | Tyler | Acrylic

AMONG THE ANGELS' PLACE

He's gone back to the Angels' Place,
Floating high above you and I—
Feeling no pain,
Feeling no sorrow,
Back from a place where time was borrowed,
Back to a place of peace and grace.

Father bless his soul;
Father bless his being.
Shower him with a life unending;
Shower him with a love undying.
Let his heart be filled with peace;
Let his days be filled with grace
As he walks among the Angels' Place.

Ease your mind: he feels no pain;
Now he's got everything to gain.
Let his spirit be filled with passion;
Let his life be filled with love,
Forever to roam the heavens above:
Back to a place of peace and grace
As he walks among the Angels' Place.

Rest assured he has no sorrow,
For in this place there's always tomorrow.
Back in our Father's arms once more
Where life is precious and love is true,
He rises above me and you:
Back to a place of peace and grace
As he walks among the Angels' Place.

Shalmarie Bridges | Bén Wheeler

